VISION OF 21ST CENTURY IOWA SCHOOLS: SUPERINTENDENTS SPEAK OUT

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by Vincent J. Verlengia

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The problem. What the K-12 educational reform movement has done throughout the 1990s is to create a dialogue around the beliefs, values, and purposes of schooling in this country. Conversations among educators, legislators, federal and state policy makers, and members of the business community are well documented. What has not occurred is the consideration of the viewpoints of those who are actually implementing restructuring efforts. The purpose of this study was to add to existing research by examining what Iowa school superintendents hope for the future of K-12 schooling and to provide insights to other policy makers about what local district level leaders in the state consider important to current educational reform efforts.

Procedures. From 25 nominated superintendents 12 were chosen and asked two research questions. The methodology based on naturalistic inquiry techniques included in-depth interviews and constant comparison analysis. Literature on visionary leadership was used in reaching conclusions, implications, and recommendation for further study.

Findings. Superintendents characterized their vision of Iowa schools as caring communities of learners in which relationships were valued and nurtured, where democratic principles were modeled in all aspects of school life, and where conversation and development of human resources were valued. In addition, they hoped for a more flexible system in structure and daily functioning. The superintendents' explanation of what likely would get in the way of achieving this vision of Iowa schools encompassed four major themes: (a) insufficient funding, (b) powerful childhood memories of their own schooling along with satisfaction with their current neighborhood schools, (c) personal and professional short-comings, (d) lack of understanding of the change process.

Conclusions. As society changes schools must change as rapidly just to keep pace. Second, while superintendents can shape key factors to guide the future of schooling, other factors that are deeply embedded in the broader society will require broad community effort to help influence reform.

Recommendations.

1. Similar research should be conducted with other local district stakeholders to better understand multiple viewpoints of what schools should be

2. Research on how visions actually get implemented will be enormously important to the future of K-12 education in Iowa, as well as across the nation.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Since 1983 and the publication of A Nation at Risk, school reform has occupied both national and state educational policy agendas. Initially reform efforts to change schools were encouraged, and in some instances, mandated, by state and federal policy makers (Lewis, 1989; Schlecty, 1990). Now, a decade later, Goals 2000 has been much heralded as the federal-level focus on school reform, while state legislatures and departments of education across the nation have issued their own statements about what schools should be doing to prepare students in their states for the 21st century. Schools at the local level have responded to these calls for reform with a flurry of restructuring activities. In essence, school reform and restructuring efforts are going on everywhere throughout the nation.

While there seems to exist general consensus that schools need to change, the rationale for why and how the change should occur varies. Disagreement over reform is to be expected in a democratic society, but as Lewis (1989), Schlecty (1990), Astuto, Clark, Read, McGree, and Fernandez (1994) and others have clearly pointed out, much of the current K-12 education reform has proceeded without

carefully considering the assumptions driving the reform at the local level, or the long-term needs and contexts of particular school districts. Local schools are not the same across the country, nor are all the states alike in how they view K-12 educational reform (Iowa K-12 Education Reform Study Committee, 1992 & 1993). The communities that support them and the superintendents who are leading the local level reform efforts all hold certain beliefs and values about what schools should be.

What the K-12 educational reform movement has done over the past decade is to create a great deal of dialogue around the beliefs, values, and purposes of schooling in this country. Conversations at the macro-level have been well documented; legislators, federal and state policy makers, the business community, and others have clearly articulated what they consider important (Nanus, 1992). What has not occurred as much is to listen to what those who are often held responsible for leading restructuring implementation--local school district superintendents--believe their schools should be, and to acknowledge the viewpoints of what these school leaders think will likely occur in their K-12 schools as a result of their reform efforts.

Leadership and a clear, guiding vision of the future are the key components of any significant change or reform effort (Schlecty, 1990). To date, the perspective of local

public school superintendents has primarily been assumed, only partially described, or at times, simply absent from the discussions of educational reform (Sergiovanni, 1989). Nevertheless, what school leaders envision is important because it "frames the future that one works to achieve" (Sheive & Schoenheit, 1987).

Iowa, like other states across the nation, has listened to federal rhetoric, debated school reform on the floor of the state legislature, yet frequently failed to consider what those at the local level thought important for educational reform. This study is an effort to ask superintendents what they think should be the future of K-12 education in the 21st century and thus attempt to better understand the direction of school reform in Iowa, and indirectly, the nation.

Purpose/Importance of the Study

The purpose of this study was to contribute to a better understanding of what Iowa school superintendents believe the future of K-12 Iowa education at the turn of the century should be; to inform state and local policy makers of insights and visions that Iowa school leaders have regarding what is important for the future of the children and youth in the state; and to contribute to the literature on visionary leadership of local district level leaders.

Problem Statement

The problem of this study was to describe what Iowa superintendents envision as characteristics of the ideal Iowa school system at the turn of the century and those barriers they believe will inhibit the vision from becoming a reality.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. If you could create a system of quality Iowa schooling for the 21st century what do you believe it should look like?
2. Given your knowledge of current educational reform efforts in Iowa and your own district, what do you see are barriers that keep your ideal vision from becoming a reality?

Assumption

The underlying assumption of this study was that because the interviewees were recognized leaders in their own districts, as well as leaders in the statewide educational reform efforts, each had developed a vision of what they thought 21st-century Iowa schools should be and at

the same time were well aware of the barriers that would likely stand in the way of implementing their vision.

Limitations

The limitations of this study are:

1. There are always restraints on being completely open, superintendents' responses may be intentionally selective and the information gathered incomplete (Punch, 1986).

2. The intent of this study was to provide insight into the future of schools in Iowa. The findings cannot be generalized across districts (Merriam, 1989) or considered prescriptions for individual school districts.

3. While there are many areas of educational reform that could have been included to guide this study, as a way to narrow the scope of this research effort the interviews focused on four major factors that influence student learning: decision-making, instruction, curriculum, and technology.

Definition of Terms

The following terms were used in this study:

1. *Vision* is a blueprint of a desired state; an image of a preferred condition of the future that one works to achieve (Sheive & Schoenheit, 1987).

2. *Visionary leadership* is the leader's ability to visualize a preferred future for the organization in the context of established values, to understand the key situational characteristics that must be incorporated into their visions, to communicate the vision in terms of mission and purpose, and then to focus the attention and energies to all stakeholders on accomplishing these goals (Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Sashkin, 1988; Sheive & Schoenheit, 1987).

3. Twenty-first century as its used here focuses primarily on the first decade, or the years 2000-2010.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter explores the concept of "vision" in schooling, its relationship to leadership and, finally, its influence on the current reform efforts in America's schools.

Vision: A Definition

A vision, according to Bennis and Nanus (1985) is a clear view of a believable and attractive future for an organization, a target that beacons. It is not simply a vague ideal of a desired end; nor is it a clear picture of a single aspect. A vision is an operating paradigm of all aspects of the organization being created and the actual steps necessary to make that paradigm a reality (Behrens, 1989; Goodlad, 1990). A vision takes a picture of the whole that is more than a mere snapshot; it reflects on the process of picture-making as well as the end product (Senge, 1990). Visions compose new realities, interconnected parts. Visions for public schools involve such components as educational philosophy, values, mission, goals, culture and climate, staff development activities, curricula, organizational structures, school finance, and a myriad of other interdependent components (Renchler, 1991).

Implicit in the design of a desired reality is that a vision compels others to act (Schlecty, 1990). Visions demand change which in turn causes action. Such action has several characteristics. First, because visions create excitement by revealing ennobling underlying values and beliefs (Lewis, 1989; Senge, 1990). Statements of values and beliefs can inspire in others a passionate commitment to make the vision a reality because it involves them in a higher purpose. When people have a vision they truly want to accomplish and that matters deeply to them, their ability to create solutions and to engage in learning is enhanced (Senge, 1990).

Second, while the vision affirms the dignity, worth, and competence of those who are being asked to change, it also clearly points out that unless change does occur, the values of those individuals being asked to change will be threatened (Schlecty, 1988). The vision emphasizes that currently embraced values are more likely to be threatened if the status quo is retained than if the pain of change is endured. Corporate and educational leaders delineate the negative consequences of not pursuing desired outcomes of a vision. Creative tension is generated by concurrently presenting the vision while telling the truth about current reality (Senge, 1990).

Third, a vision refers to a future state that has never before existed. That reference to the future engenders commitments to act and differentiates a vision from strategic planning and goal-setting (Bennis & Nanus, 1985). A school, for example, is depicted in terms of how it will be positioned in its future environment and how it will function internally (Renchler, 1991).

Visions without reference to an idealized future are weak and hollow. These visions will not muster the will and hard work necessary to transform the vision to reality. Commitment to change is generated only when attention is focused on future solutions rather than present dilemmas (Schlecty, 1988). Envisioning involves a belief that the future can be influenced and changed by what one does now. Effective school leaders create strategic visions that connect the reality of the present to the possibilities of the future (Renchler, 1991).

Fourth, visions focus on results (Schlecty, 1990). Visions containing measurable outcomes of both short and long-term targets (Herman, 1990) cause purposeful action. Members of the organization must know that everyone will be expected to judge their own performance and the performance of others against clear outcomes embedded in the vision. When a comprehensive vision has been created, outcomes are not measured in isolation. Instead, individuals also should

ask "Am I doing all I can do to assure that this organization is getting the results it should get without violating the values we hold sacred?"

Great visions are usually considered by the majority to be unattainable and impractical. But it is the quality that fascinates and gives the vision its power. Presidents Kennedy and Johnson envisioned landing on the moon. Martin Luther King envisioned a world where citizens were judged by accomplishments and not skin color. Neither dream was tied to the realities of the time in which they were conceived. Visions like these that cause significant change are novel, bold, brave, and even frightening to those who can not or will not look beyond the present (Schlecty, 1990).

Vision: Relationship to Leadership

The notions of leadership and vision are closely intertwined. When Bennis and Nanus (1985) interviewed 90 successful corporate and public sector leaders, they found that all of them possessed a compelling vision and demonstrated an unparalleled concern with the outcomes implicit in their vision. Leaders are paradigm pioneers (Barker, 1988). They craft the future through vision. They do not wait for it to happen.

Successful educational leaders possess visions (Chance & Grady, 1990). Effective Texas school principals could

leadership provide positive reinforcement for good work, merit pay for increased performance, promotion for increased persistence, and a feeling of belonging for cooperation (Sergiovanni, 1990). Senge (1990) talks of transactional leaders as ones who often focus on achieving something relative to an outsider. School superintendents who desire their student achievements scores to be higher than a neighboring district, or CEOs who want to beat out the competition and become number one, are examples of leaders with extrinsically motivated visions. Schlecty, (1988) goes on to explain that while such outside threats can unite groups against something, they do not generate action directed toward attaining worthwhile goals. In essence educational leaders practicing transactional leadership encourage their staff to do what is expected, but little else (Sergiovanni, 1990).

Successful leaders do more. They marshall their internal will by focusing on personal, intrinsic inner standards of excellence (Senge, 1990). Their vision develops from a look inside themselves and an examination of the purposes, beliefs, and values that they cherish. They create their organizational vision around this knowledge. Burns (1978) calls this kind of leadership "transformational" leadership.

clearly describe their visions, while ineffective principals had no vision for their school (Behrens, 1989). Instead, less skilled principals focused on maintaining tranquillity and the status quo.

The visions successful principals create are powerful. After observing eight very good elementary school principals, Blumberg and Greenfield (1980) noted one characteristic they all shared: their visions for their schools were noble, realistic, and clear. They provided a sharp image of their future schools that included a careful description of their own roles in those schools, a clear image of the change process itself, and a framework within which to act on a daily basis (Manasse, 1986).

Sheive and Schoenheit (1987), in their study of 12 highly effective educational leaders, found that their visions contained two dimensions. They created an organizational vision focused on the specific outcomes they wished to see materialize in their particular schools. They also espoused a universal vision that transcended their local conditions and articulated their general philosophy of education.

Many less effective school leaders develop visions predicated only on external standards and rewards (Burns, 1978; Senge, 1990). Burns (1978) calls this "transactional" leadership. School leaders utilizing a transactional form of

Transformational leaders help motivate their followers by helping them to higher order psychological needs, needs for esteem, autonomy, and self-actualization (Sergiovanni, 1990). They inspire their followers by focusing them on moral questions. Transformational leaders know that what counts to most people is what they believe, how they feel, and the social bonds they form (Etzioni, 1988). Transformational school leaders create commitment in their staff, commitment to a set of purposes and beliefs about teaching and learning, and a vision of what the school district can become (Sergiovanni, 1990).

One of the challenges facing school leaders is developing the ability to connect their hectic routine activities to instructional outcomes (Dwyer, 1984). Effective school leaders do this by establishing visions that are firmly grounded in a well-defined set of purposes (Leithwood, 1987; Leithwood & Stager, 1989). Their vision profoundly affects the content of their daily routine. Research conducted at the Center for the Advanced Study of Educational Leadership (Hallinger & McCary, 1991) suggests that educational leaders who implement the leadership function in ways that make a difference for students and teachers consider the interplay between actions and responses in light of a set of purposes.

Visionary leaders are avid learners. They have a passionate commitment to changing the way they and others think and do business (Senge, 1990). They manage themselves well (Bennis & Nanus, 1985) and understand that self management is critical to supporting the initiatives of others without becoming patronizing. Their healthy self-regard allows them to extend involvement in the school's improvement to teachers, parents, and students (Barth, 1990).

Visionary leaders start by pursuing their own vision but they learn to listen carefully to others' visions and see that their vision is part of something larger (Senge, 1990). Instead of possessing their vision they become its steward. The vision ceases to be a possession and becomes a calling. George Bernard Shaw (Senge, 1990) describes the transcendent quality that energizes visionary leaders:

> This is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one . . . the being a force of nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy. (p. 352)

Visionary leaders are not necessarily charismatic personalities (Peters & Waterman, 1982). They are not always imposing people with fire in their bellies. Some leaders inspire others with their high visibility and constancy. Their knack at shaping values and selling their vision is

tied to their sincerity. They do not give up. They live their dream--everyday. Not only do they talk incessantly about their vision, but also work to reinforce it through personal actions, hiring practices, and organizational structures they support (Rogus, 1990). Visionary leaders are continually helping people see the big picture: how parts of their organization interact and the longer and broader impact of local decisions (Senge, 1990). Visionary leaders are teachers. They do not pretend to have final answers. Most importantly visionary leaders are humble, life-long learners.

Vision: Influence on School Reform

Most current proponents of school reform develop only one good idea and rarely, if ever, do the myriad of recommendations in recent educational reform reports connect. While a few of the reports have attempted to create an integrated conception of the complex school systems, in general they have not developed proactive, future oriented, holistic visions that describe desirable and excellent outcomes (Sarason, 1990). In 1984 the Department of Education described in A Nation Responds: Recent Efforts to Improve Education the tidal wave of reforms that occurred in response to the National Commission on Excellence in Education's report of the previous year, A Nation at Risk

(Passow, 1989). This report provided an extraordinary array of reform initiatives: site-based management, business school partnerships, changes in vocational education, and the need for a technological revolution. By 1986, however, most of these reform efforts were unified by two primary themes: more rigorous academic standards for students and more recognition and higher standards for teachers.

Like all reform reports that have appeared regularly since the Report of the Committee of Ten in 1893, the outpouring of activities at the federal, state, and local levels after publication of A Nation at Risk focused on fixing aspects of the current system of American education (Passow, 1989). The system itself was never questioned and not one report asked why these reforms should be any more successful than similar school reform efforts attempted in the past (Sarason, 1990). No report was found that questioned the usefulness of the current old, essentially unchanged, system in a modern society that has experienced drastic cultural changes. Since the 1970s American educational policy has shifted a great deal from equity to excellence, from needs and access to ability and selectivity, from regulations and enforcement to deregulation, from the common school to parental choice and institutional competition, and from social welfare concerns to economic and productivity concerns. Yet, even to the

untrained eye classrooms and play grounds, teachers, and instruction look remarkably the same. Current reform efforts have produced minor innovations that give the impression of change, but the deep structures of schooling stubbornly remain.

Why has the research to date failed to examine the underlying structures and systems that control the tiny pieces of daily teacher and student interaction and behavior? The literature supports the idea that the answer, like the question, is messy and complex. The organizational dynamics of school systems are embedded in and reflective of the American society that created and nurtured them (Sarason, 1990). To understand the problem and to find a meaningful answer a number of subjects must be researched. First, the universities that prepare the faculty, second, the political system that creates the rules and regulations, third, the family systems that nurture the students, and finally, the private belief systems that drive the faculty.

Once school leaders remove the protective covering they begin to see powerful structures that do control the world of schooling and discover that other structures thought to be the controllers, are non-existent. Traditional scapegoats such as funding and governance structures lose power when school leaders face the fact that the real obstacles to school reform are the values and beliefs about teaching and

learning held by members of the school community (Schlecty, 1990). They must be brave enough to admit that many of their cherished assumptions and axioms about school are no longer valid, if they ever were (Sarason, 1990).

> The problem is not technical. Nor is it motivational. Nor is it moral. The problem inheres in your unreflective acceptance of assumptions and axioms that seem so obviously right, natural, and proper that to question them is to question your reality. Therefore, faced with failure after failure, having tried this, that, and almost every thing else, you don't examine your bedrock assumptions. Instead, you come up with variations on past themes. (p. 148)

Very few current school structures influence individual teaching acts (Little, 1988). Instead, strong structures exist to make schools orderly and safe, to teach basic academic and social skills, and to maintain good relations with parents and with the local public. Yet few leaders of educational reform understand the rigid organization of schools that has evolved over several hundred years (Cuban, 1984).

Reformers with a blindness to these powerful structures often hand down harsh indictments of teachers and school administrators. Their solution to the educational mess is to get new and better trained faculty. The Holmes Group, the Carnegie Forum, and the Educational Commission of the States reports all argue that the answer to educational mediocrity is attracting better teacher candidates, providing more rigorous university training to them, and improving both the

working conditions and rewards of teachers once they are employed (Passow, 1989). Attraction and retention of more talented faculty is seen as the answer to the educational malaise. The villains are the educators and the structures that select, train, and retain them. The systemic pressures that impact on educators in the school environment are ignored.

Another faulty, narrowly focused reform effort is based on the long-standing belief that secondary teachers are somehow more rigid and less child-centered than elementary teachers. Reformers see the solution as staff development activities for existing faculty or replacement of the faculty with other more child-centered persons. Again, the focus remains on human resource development rather than on the system that impinges upon them. Structural characteristics clearly differentiate elementary schools from secondary schools (Cuban, 1984). These structures mold teacher and student behavior. Yet many reformers of secondary schools continue to focus on rehabilitating recalcitrant teachers. They do not see the enabling system. They do not recognize the three structural differences that differentiate secondary and elementary schools:

1. Differences in content: secondary schools emphasize subject matter which elementary schools focus on developing the learning tools.

2. Differences in contact time with students: secondary teachers see a particular students 55 minutes per day, elementary teachers have the same students all day.

3. Differences in external pressures: secondary teachers and students are subjected to pressure from accrediting associations, college entrance requirements, Scholastic Aptitude Tests, etc. While similar urgencies exist for elementary teachers and students the tensions are considerable less.

Reformers of secondary schools fail to recognize the power of secondary students. Authority in organizations exists only when subordinates grant their superordinates a legitimate claim on their obedience (Metz, 1990). Subordinates must decide to participate in the organization. Students may be coerced into attending school but they can withhold their cognitive and social engagement. Revamped teacher training programs, increased academic requirements, national testing, and other reform strategies are put forth without consideration of the student power structure.

There are still other examples of reform efforts that are not built on a solid understanding of the complex web of structural forces in schools. The issue of teacher autonomy and site-based management is a hot topic that appears on most school reform agendas. Teachers will adopt more effective teaching practices, the logic goes, if allowed

more control over what happens in their school and classroom. Teachers might, for example, abandon teacher-centered practices in favor of discovery learning, or they might step away from the podium and create cooperative, student-centered learning groups. Therefore, there has been and continues to be reform geared toward reshifting the power from the central administration to the school, from the principal to the teacher. The reform effort centers on an event, a single structure rather than the whole system. Why won't this change teaching practice?

The solution of site-based management and teacher empowerment are laudable goals but expecting these changes alone to transform student achievement fails to acknowledge the complex structures that move teacher behavior. Unless other structural and cultural influences are addressed, these existing influences are powerful enough to maintain teacher-centered practices (Cuban, 1984). The belief system of each teacher about children, about learning, about what schools should do powerfully influences what choices the teacher will make.

In fact, there always have been teachers who believed so strongly in practices that ran counter to the mainstream that they forged ahead (Cuban, 1984). They did it, despite their lack of empowerment, despite time and resource constraints. Both the entrenchment of teachers in old

methodologies and the willingness of certain teachers to embrace wholly different approaches to instruction can be explained by the belief system that they developed throughout their professional career. The strong belief system of some individuals might be the only force great enough to cause or inhibit change by itself. However, individuals with the strength necessary to counter other powerful organizational forces are rare. The daily structural constraints of time and resources and conflicting cultural norms defeat many more teachers, even empowered teachers. Most teachers give up when they see that they have chosen a path that is thwarted by state, district, and school policies and norms. If rewards are given to the compliant, to the orderly, will empowered teachers risk the noisy disorder of student-centered learning? Because of empowerment will they innovate and risk failure, if their school culture sends a clear message that good teachers are those whose lesson plans go off without a hitch and whose students are never off-task?

Unidimensional reforms implemented in a fragmentary fashion always have been unsuccessful in effecting real changes in teaching and learning behavior (Ancess, 1991; Sarason, 1990). Even such worthy goals as teacher empowerment need to belong to greater vision of schooling, i.e., a vision that ignites a passionate commitment to

reshape or abandon all structures that don't buttress the vision.

Another shortcoming of most educational reform efforts is that they do not talk about changing the educational system (Sarason, 1990). The visions of these reformers center on improving schools, doing what has been done, only doing it better. Cuban (1988) brands changes like these "first-order" changes.

But America's schools are not less effective than they once were (Schlecty, 1990). In fact, they are better at doing what they were expected to do in the past. The problem is that the schools of today and tomorrow face tasks that their educational ancestors never dreamed of tackling. Schools do not need improvement, they need radical transformation. They need new goals, new structures, new roles and ways of solving problems or what Cuban (1988) terms "second-order" changes.

Educational reform reports focus on villains, problems, and band-aid solutions. Yet, bringing any organization to excellence requires a vision of its ideal form, one that is future-oriented and starts with grand notions of what might be. Dreams of space travel had no relevance to the earthly problems of the 1950s. Flying to the moon was not suggested by Presidents Johnson and Kennedy as a way to eradicate poverty or eliminate any other social ills. Instead, they

dreamt of a magnificent future America. America would not only occupy a piece of the plane, but a piece of the sky. In scores of educational reform reports, there are no magnificent dreams of future schools. Instead most reformers accept the system as it is and suggest that the egregious problems of education can be fixed by improving particularly dysfunctional parts.

The powerful force of vision of what could be is not behind most reform efforts. Instead educational reformers seem to assure that what was true in the past will be true in the future (Sarason, 1990).

> It makes quite a difference if one approaches it (school reform) with a clear preventive orientation rather than with one geared to problems that are so severe and pervasive that one is forced to take some remedial action. . . . As one superintendent of schools said to me: "Of course you are right. But who has time to think about preventing problems when we don't have enough time to deal with existing problems. Think preventively? Come off it. That is a luxury school systems cannot afford." (p. 45)

Although reform efforts speak dramatically of restructuring education, the focus is on a limited set of structures. Consistently ignored are powerful structures that continue to silently control outcomes (McNeil, 1988). Reformers make the assumption that American schools and students are more alike than different and that one dream, one vision, one set of policies and mandates can lead the way to excellence for all (Metz, 1990). Reform agendas

rarely acknowledge the sometimes profound cultural differences of communities and schools. They propose stiff academic requirements for graduation, centrally prescribed curricula, increased testing, hallmarks of "real school" or schooling as it is commonly defined. Yet human and material resources in schools vary significantly from school to school. Inner city schools cry out for a vision that is very different from a school in a rural farm community.

If schools are to promote excellence for all of the American people, visions of schooling in the 21st century must vary. While American educational visions ought to express the common goals of society, schools and communities must be free to create visions that also reflect them and their unique needs and aspirations (Fullan, 1991).

Finally, current educational reform got its power from an astute combination of politics and leadership (Lewis, 1989). Former President Reagan and his two Secretaries of Education, Terrel H. Bell and William J. Bennet, made masterful use of their high offices as "bully pulpits." With an effective use of rhetoric and symbols, they made schooling a hot and profitable political issue. This reform-through-rhetoric approach is shallow; by themselves, exhortations and mandates will never produce fundamental and lasting change.

Summary

In reforming organizations, there has to be a driving vision, a vision containing a sophisticated plan for systemic organizational change. Technical documents such as the plethora of reform reports already written are readily forgotten; vision stays with us (Lewis, 1989).

But American education does not need reforming, if reforming means adjusting the current system by making incremental, adaptive improvements (Deal, 1990; Soltis, 1990). It needs a "reformation" similar to the one that spawned completely new Protestant religious denominations. This will require thinking about education in truly new and profoundly different ways. As Glickman (1990) notes, "the time to release ourselves from simplistic and ineffective prescriptions has passed; the time to dream is upon us" (p. 69).

Reform will require leadership that has the ability to question established and entrenched traditions in light of the bigger picture, as well as having a clear sense of what that bigger picture is (Harrington-Lueker, 1990). Kentucky's Education Reform Act of 1990 is one rare example of the radical reform that is needed. Frank Newman, president of the Education Commission of the States describes Kentucky's reform as "the first time any state has gone back to the

drawing board and rebuilt its entire education system from scratch" (p. 17).

The research detailed here suggests that reform efforts aimed at creating excellent 21st century Iowa schools must first begin with a simple understanding that vision is a picture of a desired state that transforms old paradigms into new realities. School leaders must then facilitate, collect, and analyze broad, future-oriented visions of ideal 21st century Iowa schooling. Then, skillfully craft a vision based upon what the community values and believes and is willing to support to make its educational dreams come true.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

The actual research design, data collection, and data analysis for this study were derived from a theoretical foundation of naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In-depth interviews were used as a means of recording the actual language exemplary superintendents used to describe their desired vision of K-12 Iowa schooling in the 21st century. Interviewing practicing superintendents, who were both knowledgeable in current state-wide school reform efforts, as well as involved in the restructuring of their own school districts, allowed the researcher to explore insights (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992) and gain meaning (Mishler, 1986) of various attitudes and perceptions about K-12 Iowa schooling in the next century.

Interviewees Selection

Interviewees for this study were identified by using what Glesne and Peshkin describe as "networking techniques" (1992, p. 27). The professionals who assisted in the identification of the interviewees were the Associate Executive Director of the Iowa Department of Education, the Executive Director of the School Administrators of Iowa and his staff, and respected colleagues from Iowa's Area

Education Agencies. These individuals work on a regular basis with a majority of Iowa superintendents and thus had first-hand knowledge of local school district restructuring efforts.

The criteria used for selecting the superintendents to interview was: (a) they were recognized by their peers as leaders in the Iowa reform effort, (b) they were engaged in reform efforts in their own district, and (c) they were articulate visionary leaders who were thoughtful about what they believe Iowa schools should be and understand the obstacles that could prevent future change from occurring. Based on this criteria 18 superintendents comprised the pool of potential interviewees. These were the individuals who were nominated at least twice and who were available for interviewing during the time period of the study. From this pool interviews were scheduled, keeping in mind geographic location, school population, and gender. Interviews were conducted until the interviewees gave the same responses (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As Seidman (1991) points out, although a researcher may start out ahead of time with a set number of participants or sites, they begin to recognize a point of saturation, or when they have "enough" (p. 45) data that they no longer are learning anything new from the process. Saturation for this study occurred after 12 interviews.

Gaining Access

The researcher personally contacted each of the interviewees by telephone to see if they were willing to participate in the study. The general nature of the study was explained and they were told how and why they were selected. Next, they were provided the two research questions that would be explored during the interview and were informed that the in-depth interview would last approximately 90 minutes and it would be audio recorded if they agreed. Each of the interviewees consented to be taped. Finally, each interviewee was assured that they would not be identified in the study and that if choices needed to be made regarding the reporting of the data, their interests and wishes would be considered first (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 1987; Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Following the interview each person was sent a thank-you note and informed they would receive a copy of the results of the study once it was completed.

Data Collection

Qualitative research includes a variety of data gathering techniques including four basic procedures: observation, interviews, documents, and visual images (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). In-depth interviews were used for

this study because interviewing reflects an assumption that through direct first-person accounts by people who are encountering the experience, one can gain a holistic perspective or overall understanding of the research problem and questions (Moustakas, 1990, p. 38; Patton, 1990, p. 49). Moreover, interviewing helps establish rapport and can serve as a means for sharing confidential knowledge which the interviewee might otherwise be reluctant to put into writing (Seidman, 1991). Finally, the stories that these superintendents told were most accurately captured by the language they used to talk about their experiences, perceptions, and thoughts. Interviewing provided a format that was both natural and reflective of the interviewee's perceptions, yet at the same time it provided the researcher with opportunities to align the interviewees' responses with the intent of the questions (Mouley, 1978).

While in-depth interviews were the primary sources of data for the study, the researcher also took field notes to describe observations that seemed appropriate at the time of the interviews (Patton, 1990) and kept a field log of analytical impressions, ideas, interpretations or "memos" (Glesne & Pishkin, 1992, p. 49) throughout the research process.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data followed procedures suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967), Lincoln and Guba (1985), and Marshall and Rossman (1989) for coding and development of themes utilizing a process of constant comparison and continual searching for on-going patterns and trends among the data. Assessment of the data began during the data-collection period. After each new interview was completed, the transcript was compared with previous interviews and the researcher noted in writing recurring responses for both research questions. Interview notes were also reviewed and similarities and differences were noted.

The second phase of the data analysis procedure occurred after all 12 interviewees were completed. The final interview transcripts were reviewed for common themes as well as differences among these patterns (Doyle, 1978). This began the iterative process of developing tentative descriptive categories of the superintendents' composite vision of what Iowa schooling should look like in the 21st century as well as the barriers identified by the interviewees.

Once themes or patterns were identified, the researcher began to "unitized" (p. 344) the data through a content analysis process that reduce the data into the smallest

piece of meaningful information that can be interpreted to reveal relevancy to the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Each unit of information was written on an index card, identifying the source of the quote to use in an inter-person comparison (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Miles & Huberman, 1987). The cards were then sorted into categories reflecting the purpose of the study and each category was compared to generate statements regarding relationships. This comparative method of data analysis (Merriam, 1989) was used to guide the coding process, taking care to code and analyze the data according to the content of the response of the interviewee, not the question prompted by the researcher (Tesch, 1990). A similar analytical process was used with the field notes that were written during the course of the interviewing process. Interviews were reviewed, data recoded, and then rewritten in order to more clearly define and describe patterns and themes that emerged throughout the data analysis process.

Trustworthiness

As a qualitative research project this study follows the tradition set by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and more recently Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen (1993), and Glesne and Peshkin (1992) who suggest the importance of the concept of trustworthiness in carrying out qualitative

research. In an effort to address these concerns the researcher listened to the audio tapes twice, each time the verbatim transcript was compared with the audio recording. If necessary, corrections were made to the transcript.

Next, a colleague who held an administrative position in a local district office and is familiar with the content of the interviews and the methodology of the study reviewed three of the interviews for: (a) accuracy of the interview transcripts and audio recordings, (b) logical placement of the interview data according to emerging themes, and (c) any apparent inconsistencies of data collection and analysis. Much in the spirit of an external auditor (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), this person served as "critical friend" throughout the data analysis process. After reviewing the initial three interview transcripts, he continued to review the categorization of data, review drafts of the data analysis, and ask clarifying questions.

Personal commitment to objectivity, the extended time the researcher spent examining and reviewing the data, the notes taken throughout the data collection process, and the constant comparisons (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) of data analysis contributed to the trustworthiness of the results of this study.

The Researcher's Perspective

Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert that as the researcher gains an understanding, even sympathy of the interviewees, these insights increase the likelihood that he will be better able to describe the complex social system being researched (p. 318). Since the fall of 1994 the researcher of this study was a superintendent of a local school district in Iowa. Through daily experience the researcher learned the language of a school superintendent and is sensitive to the constant challenges and decisions presently facing Iowa superintendents. The researcher has knowledge of the structure of the school organization and holds the belief that the school superintendent is the key person responsible for the development and implementation of a district vision of what schools should be.

Along with this knowledge base, the researcher is also aware that his own experience and dispositions made a difference in how he determined the interview questions, probed for understanding, and interpreted the data. He was aware throughout the research study of the necessity to "monitor" his own subjectivity (Peshkin 1988, p. 20) and tried not to present the interview questions or findings as a form of his own vision of education, but rather as that of

others who have similar, yet at the same time, different values, perspectives, and experiences than his.

Chapter 4

FINDINGS

The findings presented in this chapter are divided into two sections, each pertaining to the research questions of the study. The first section details what superintendents said when they were asked to portray what they envisioned as ideal 21st century schooling in Iowa. Their responses are organized around educational reform issues that focus on student learning and which guided the scope of this study. These include: (a) Decision-making, (b) Instruction, (c) Curriculum, and (d) Technology. For each of these four areas, common themes are reported with quotes from the interviewees as points of illustration.[1] The second section presents themes which emerged when the interviewees spoke of barriers they perceived that might stand in the way of having their ideal vision materialize. Both sections conclude with a summary and discussion of the common themes.

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[1]Note to the reader - To avoid sexist language and awkward sentence structure, the use of feminine and masculine pronouns are alternated throughout this chapter.

Visions of 21st Century Schooling

The superintendents were asked: If you could create a system of quality Iowa schooling for the 21st century what do you believe it should look like? Four probe questions were used to frame the interview in the areas of decision making, instruction, curriculum, and educational technology. Those questions and the superintendents responses follow.

Decision Making

Each of the superintendents was asked: Who do you think will be the major participants in school decision making? What will be the role of the federal government, the Iowa State Legislature, local school boards, district administrators, school based administrators, teachers, and parents? The following reflects their responses.

Federal Government

Several superintendents applauded the federal government's attempt to focus attention on education and would have their ideal 21st century federal government continue this practice. Many superintendents were fearful of more non-funded mandates from Capitol Hill. One superintendent wanted his ideal federal government to articulate "a national vision of education" and also wanted government to pass laws, that will make sure that young

people stay in school such as those laws prohibiting the employment or the issuance of a driver's license to anyone who is under 18 and not in school.

The majority of the superintendents who did talk about the role of the federal government did not like the idea of national assessments or national curricula. "Goals 2000 is a nice thought but it is purely political and not educational," said one superintendent. "A federal direction for education must come from educators at the grass roots, anything else is doomed to fail," advocated another.

Another frustrated superintendent summed up her feelings of federal involvement with these strong comments:

> Hell, government will be involved just like I have always seen them - as a hindrance to all that we do. I don't even want to talk anymore about it. I think the federal government has nothing but blocks to put in our way. They talk about sharing federal money but what pittance you get you might as well forgo and do what you want. They will talk about goals 2000 and they will try to have school structured towards it but they don't even know what the hell it is. I'm disenchanted with all government.

Iowa State Legislature

Almost all of the superintendents agreed that the role of state government would be diminished in their ideal 21st century Iowa system of education. Some would create 21st century state education agencies that "stopped forcing change from the top down." One would create a state agency

that issued "no mandates." Another angrily proclaimed, "Schools can't be governed by politicians in Des Moines!"

Other superintendents want a quieter role for state officials because "mandates don't work," but they would delegate to the state "broad policy-making abilities." Another superintendent sees the role of the state government in his ideal school system as a "friendly critic" who "sets broad goals." Still another superintendent only wanted the state government to "provide equitable funding." A third superintendent preferred "the state to be responsible for funding," she thought all other decisions should be made at the local level because, "the more you centralize, the worse things become."

Still other superintendents hoped the state education agencies would hold limited policy-making power. As one interviewee remarked, "there is a fine line between needing mandates and allowing autonomy." This, said another, related to the governing concept of "balancing society's rights with the rights of the individual."

One superintendent would allow a 21st century state education agency to "prescribe some curricula." Another superintendent, who advocated open enrollment, saw his ideal state agency "providing funding, informing parents, and regulating the process." Another prescribed a strong regulating role of the state agency, but the recipients of

these regulations "would only be schools that don't take responsibility and don't demonstrate decent outcomes."

When asked "Who should author state mandates?" one superintendent said, "the courts and the legislature should not design transformation." Another said, "the role of the legislature is to ask professionals what they think needs to be done." One superintendent thought that in her ideal Iowa school system, "politicians would be needed to support reform, but they would never assume that they were educators and knew what to do."

Local School Boards

Several superintendents expressed strong reservations about the use of school boards to govern their ideal 21st century Iowa school systems. One dubbed them "an endangered species." Others were more blunt with comments such as, "elected school boards cannot continue to exist," and "we will not need school boards in the future." In some instances, gentler voices communicated that "school boards as we know them now will disappear." Expanding on that theme, a superintendent stated he believed school boards were not needed in his ideal Iowa school system because "it will be a totally democratic situation," inferring that many, if not all, individuals within the school culture would have input into the decision-making process.

Those superintendents whose vision included a school board governance body envisioned that the function of the board would be redesigned. "A school board should be like a board of directors; they wouldn't manage schools, they'd be disconnected from the daily operations of schools," stated one superintendent. Others depicted the new configuration as "including a broader range of decision makers, not just the traditional school board membership," with "school boards being replaced with site-based decision teams consisting of parents, teachers, administrators and students." Those who were unsure of what might replace school boards if they did not exist as we presently know them generally spoke more of "rethinking the role of school board members," rather than the function or responsibility of the board as a governing body.

District Administrators

Overwhelmingly, the superintendents embrace the idea of a collaborative style of leadership. Many saw Central office transformed into "service centers" rather than "regulating agencies," with administrators responsible for "providing resources and support services." Specifically, their role with schools would be "totally collaborative," and at every level administrators would "model democracy."

One superintendent stated that "the notion of principal as autocrat is finished." Superintendents preferred calling principals "facilitators" as they emphasized the evolving role change.

One superintendent likened the ideal 21st century Iowa school administrator to a facilitator "getting the best out of everyone around him." He went on to say, "knowledgeable teaching professionals can and must make important decisions, and the principal's responsibility in the future will be to make sure resources are available to accomplish the teacher's mission."

The superintendents felt that principals would become "part of a leadership team," "leaders of leaders." One superintendent said it was important that this transformed, collaborative leader relate well and inspire trust in the faculty because "the principal needed to be able to make mundane, daily decisions independently." Only one superintendent described a principal as the person "who held others accountable."

"Site-based management," "school-based decision-making," "decentralized decision-making and collaborative decision making," were all used to describe the superintendents' ideal Iowa school decision-making frame. One superintendent described herself as "an advocate of local control, including site-based management." The

majority of superintendents describe their ideal Iowa school system as one that allowed "maximum authority for teaching and learning at the local district and school site."

Different superintendents offered slightly different versions of site-based decision-making in their ideal Iowa school systems. One superintendent described his ideal school system as being a "loose network of independent schools." Another superintendent described an Iowa school district in which schools would not operate independently, "there would be coordination and articulation throughout the district." Still another superintendent desired a system of site-based management but did not want each school "to be self-governing" and does not want community boards running the school."

"The democratic process of decision making," would be modeled everywhere in one superintendent's vision of an ideal Iowa school system. Another superintendent stresses the importance of including "resources and responsibilities" with the notion of local faculty empowerment.

Teachers

Teachers in the superintendent's ideal Iowa schools "form collective visions," and in one superintendent's school system of the future teachers would actualize that vision. "All members of the faculty would be involved in

decision making, even though this is a time-consuming process."

Another superintendent took this idea even further, when she explained that in her ideal Iowa school, there would be "a collaborative school-wide structure of leadership," a place where teachers would be "autonomous, well-prepared, competent professionals" who are "not led by rules and regulations but encouraged to take risks and dream of what can be for their students." Another superintendent envisions "a variety of teacher leadership roles, but they will be more disbursed among the faculty."

"Teaming" and "shared decision making" were governance strategies all superintendents envisioned for the future. Instead of the more traditional model of utilizing a hierarchy of teacher leaders, superintendents talked of "participatory democracy" with "greater proportional representation of the constituencies of the school.

Parents

Superintendents repeated the collaborative theme when describing how their ideal school would relate with parents and the community. One superintendent said he would charge his 21st century school personnel to "form a coalition with business and parents." Parents and community members have a right to "meaningful involvement" stated another

interviewee. Others agreed with comments like, "If you pay, you have the right to have a voice and opinion on how the money should be spent," and "customers of schools need to be involved."

A few superintendents viewed 21st century parents and community members as constituents who have the right to know what kind of results their tax dollars are buying. Twenty-first century Iowa schools should be "accountable to the public," said one, while another advocated allowing educators to make the decisions, and then "holding them accountable" to the community for the results they produced.

One superintendent envisioned her ideal Iowa school system as "forming a network, not a hierarchy" that included all people who had a stake in schools. Others saw it as a "mixture of parents, principals, teachers, support staff all affecting important school outcomes," and "decisions being made by the community." "Schools would be a community of people really involved in making decisions through the democratic process." Stressing the quality of the decision making and involvement of parents and community members several superintendents stated that they would want them to take a "real and meaningful role."

To create this involvement, one superintendent suggested "setting up town meetings to get as many parents as possible involved." His goal was to "broaden the parent

representation," rather than just create more meetings with the same small group of parents. Still another superintendent would establish periodic meetings between "the business community, parents, and kids" to formulate the mission and goals of the school.

Instruction

The superintendents were asked, "What instructional techniques or strategies do you envision being used to deliver curriculum in 21st century Iowa schools?"

Flexible

All superintendents wanted classroom instruction in their 21st century Iowa schools to be flexible and constantly changing to meet the needs of particular groups of students. One superintendent says "there are lots of good ways to get at objectives" and in her ideal school she would encourage various instructional approaches "throughout the district and throughout the grades."

Most spoke of instruction that carried "process at different paces," and that "accommodates different cognitive styles, modality preferences, and left and right brain learners." Students will be instructed in a variety of configurations, "in groups, alone, at home, or by a computer." These superintendents want teachers to "look at their students' unique needs and then decide what to do."

One superintendent said that his ideal teachers "must find out what works with different populations" and develop instructional approaches that are "contact sensitive." The preferred instructional method would respond "to the different learning needs of urban and rural students, of students from different racial and ethnic groups."

Two superintendents thought that pull-out programs had value and they would include them in the 21st century Iowa instructional program, although with modifications from what we presently do. One wanted "limited pull-outs," specifying she would not want to see gifted and talented kids completely segregated from the regular instructional program. Other superintendents viewed separate pull-out programs as "not necessarily bad, sometimes even better than the regular classroom," but waned them used judiciously with special teachers working some of the time in the regular classroom.

One superintendent clearly did not believe instructional programs would include "tracking," because "the research did not support its use." In her 21st century Iowa school, students would not be assigned to different groups based on their abilities.

Collaboration

Ten superintendents wanted their ideal school environment to incorporate the use of instructional approaches that "require cooperation and teamwork," that "involves kids in community service," and that teaches children "to be successful collaborators." One superintendent states it clearly when she described her ideal instructional approach as one in which children "learn to negotiate, resolve problems, communicate, and build-relationships." Others expanded her resolve with explanations of how instruction would promote "more cooperative learning, more like the real world." It would increase "effective skill development" and teach "people to work together."

Active Learning

A majority of the superintendents thought instructional approaches that made "learning a lot of fun" and "eliminated boredom," would be important to the school's future. They described instruction that would as include "active learning," "no standing and lecturing," "open participation," and "work that is meaningful and relevant to students." Kids would be "highly engaged," and "participate in projects." There would be "more field trips," stated one interviewee, with instructional approaches that would "build

on the students' spirit of adventure and inquiry" and cause students to feel "excitement." Another superintendent said he would "relate the material to the students." One superintendent said that in her ideal school she would "tailor the method but not the curriculum to kids."

Assessment

Over half of the superintendents would redesign student assessment procedures for their 21st century Iowa schools. Instead of a heavy reliance on standardized tests written in multiple choice or fill-in-the-blank format, these superintendents recommended tests requiring student performance. They wanted to test "the cohesion of knowledge, not particles of knowledge."

They prefer tests that required "real life activities," that asked students to "perform a certain set of complex tasks," to "complete a project," or "to read a newspaper." At the same time, they thought "authentic assessments" that were "qualitative" in design and asked students to "demonstrate their learning," were critical. Several superintendents envisioned "portfolios" of student work being used instead of test scores to evaluate student progress.

One superintendent stressed that he wanted "learning for understanding, not grades." Another superintendent said

test results would be used "diagnostically" to "inform parents" of student progress. "Continuous progress checks" are more valuable than once a year standardized test scores," said one superintendent. She went on to explain that "grades would be based on mastery, not test-taking skills."

One superintendent even dreamed of assessments that would be "celebrations of successes, not just summative processes," using multidimensional tests including "paper and pencil, tape recorder, or through performances."

While several others saw assessment procedures including finding out "how kids do after they leave school, on the job, in college, in their interpersonal lives." Or as one superintendent preferred to describe, "content mastery of individual objectives."

Curriculum

The superintendents were asked, "What will be the form and substance of the curriculum in 21st century Iowa schools?"

Basics

Some superintendents were in favor of a curriculum that clearly prescribed a core of basic skills, while others had only a general notion of what their curriculum would be. One superintendent could not precisely define what his ideal

curriculum would consist of, but he knew that in his ideal school the faculty would "find out what really had to be done" and they would "get rid of the busy work." Another recommended "cutting out choices and streamlining the curriculum." Although she admitted there was "no one best way to teach," she thought you could identify basic skills to be taught. One superintendent wanted a "core curriculum that would bind people and society together, that would build a sense of community of students."

Another said that what was essential to him was "what students needed to know to be valuable to society." He knew that he would recommend teaching "less of the classics" and would concentrate on developing "minimum competencies." Still another superintendent did not provide specific details about her ideal curriculum but instead said it would be "prescribed by the school community." Another says there can "never" be one description of what everyone needs to know."

Eight superintendents had very definite ideas about what they believed must be contained in their ideal curriculum. Most of them mentioned the importance of teaching "basic skills." For one superintendent, the basics in his ideal curriculum start with traditional subject matter "literature, history, math, and science." He went on to say that his essential curriculum would contain much

more. He would make sure that his ideal curriculum taught "study skills" and that his arts curriculum would give "every child a chance to sing." One superintendent emphasized that in her ideal 21st century Iowa curriculum "art will be essential."

One superintendent described his curriculum as starting with the basics, teaching students to "spell well and compute." Another wanted a basic curriculum that teaches students "to read, do math, know geography, and support themselves." Until middle school, the students need to read, write, think, and compute, says one superintendent and then after that "concentrate on the traditional bodies of knowledge, the classics, history, but most importantly we must keep school academically focused."

A few superintendents added more novel pieces to their essential curriculum. One superintendent would require that ethics be taught to all students. Another superintendent described a core curriculum that included language arts, reading, math, and technology, taught at all grade levels, starting at kindergarten." Another superintendent said that in addition to math, science, and communication, she would make sure all students "were taught about human behavior and cultures."

One superintendent opposes a teacher-developed curriculum and says that "teachers should not develop their

own curriculum" but "the plans for implementing, yes." Another superintendent concurs, saying "How it is taught is up to the teacher, but not what is taught."

Half of the superintendents said that in their ideal 21st century Iowa school "the curriculum would be difficult" and "not watered down." They would design a curriculum that was "challenging" and they would "maintain high standards," "expect mastery," and "end social promotions."

Two superintendents want the accelerated curriculum usually only offered to gifted students to be taught to all students.

Choice

Over half of the superintendents thought that students and teachers should have some choice about the curriculum. One said that a standardized curriculum was O.K. in his ideal school, but that teachers and students should "always have a choice."

One superintendent wanted "every child to be involved in something other than the regular academic program, and children would choose what to take." Another superintendent wanted students in her ideal school to be "engaged with problems and ideas that they have created."

Another superintendent wanted at least part of his ideal curriculum to come from "the talents of the teachers

and the interests of the students." He wanted a more "entrepreneurial" feeling about curriculum development and wants "kids to do more, to lead more."

And yet a third superintendent said students in her ideal school would "have lots of choices, be able to influence their learning objectives and design ways of getting there." In this ideal school, "kids have more responsibility for determining their learning and interests."

Diverse

A number of superintendents would create ideal curriculums from with a multicultural perspective. "The world is changing and we ought to reflect multiple perspectives, teach all the myths" said one superintendent. These superintendents wanted a curriculum that was "sensitive to racial and cultural differences," and a "global" curriculum using materials that "reflect a respect for diversity." "Iowa really doesn't have much diversity but our kids aren't just staying in Iowa anymore," said one superintendent. "They must have a sensitivity to the rest of the world and its people."

One superintendent recommended "downplaying Western heritage and presenting a broader view of world cultures." To another superintendent, the curriculum should present

"alternative models of understanding" and be responsive to "diverse cultures." "The historical core should be sensitized to multicultural issues," said one superintendent. "We must present the various strengths and weaknesses of various people in the world, we can't exist as an island," says another superintendent.

Problem-solving

Ten superintendents specifically mentioned that their curriculum would concentrate on teaching students to think and problem-solve. One superintendent specifically said that her curriculum would de-emphasize "rote memorization and drills." They want to create graduates who can "synthesize information, solve problems, and make decisions."

"I want people with a capability to think, "to be able to entertain the "what ifs" and the "why nots" explains one superintendent. She would teach logic to all students. Another superintendent explains "I don't want technocrats, I want people who can think, solve problems, and make their own decisions."

"The curriculum is too easy," complains another superintendent. His ideal curriculum would be "harder" and he would teach students how to think, how knowledge is discovered and applied in the real world." He would teach students to approach problems "creatively and critically."

Another superintendents' curriculum "encourages inquisitiveness" and "integrates thinking skills into the entire curriculum."

Still another recommends a curriculum that teaches "higher order thinking skills and creativity." She wants students to "make knowledge, not just absorb it" and "understand how knowledge is produced." One superintendent wants a curriculum that comes from the kids, "Kids would construct knowledge, rather than being fed knowledge by adults."

One superintendent thinks science is the ideal vehicle for teaching thinking and problem solving. He would teach "the scientific methods of investigation" and then have students apply these to "real problems in the community." Students would have to exercise decision-making capabilities as they first choose the problem to investigate and then choose the solution to apply.

These superintendents want a curriculum that "equips students with research skills," that "teaches processes not specifics," and encourages "curiosity" and "intellectual exploration." One superintendent promised that "problem-solving, inventing, creating and innovating would all be valued and rewarded" in her school.

Integrated, Thematic

A "thematic, interdisciplinary" curriculum as opposed to a "departmentalized" one was recommended by eight of the superintendents. They want a curriculum that "integrates information gleaned from the different content areas." They want "the lines between the subjects to be blurred." They want to see "writing across the curriculum," and "thinking across the curriculum." They want instruction to be organized around real experiences and not "fragmented and individualized," and not organized around "discrete tasks."

To accomplish this, the superintendents created interdisciplinary units, cross-division teams, and across-grade-level teams. One superintendent wants "children of all learning from each other" and wants "subjects integrated like they are in real life." Another superintendent would eliminate "blocks of instructional time" that are dedicated to one particular subject like math or art, so that "information could be processed across all kinds of content." The ideal curriculum is one superintendents' school would "integrate vocational skills, there would be no training in specifics." All subjects would be integrated in this school and there would be no "35 minute periods."

National

Half of the superintendents had an opinion on the place of a national curriculum in their ideal 21st century Iowa system of schooling. Three thought that a national curriculum was "O.K.," could "promote fast change," and that "we need greater centralization of what is taught." One superintendent thought that national curricula "might be pretty good documents to use as a general guideline." Yet another superintendent did not want a national curriculum as a part of his ideal system of 21st century Iowa education.

Technology

The superintendents were asked, "What will be the role of technology in the learning process?"

Instructional Tool

All 12 superintendents described the use of technology in their ideal 21st century Iowa schools. All but one of these superintendents wanted technology to be used as an instructional tool, and not treated as a separate curriculum area. The lone dissenter believed that she would use technology "largely as a tool," but thinks that it is also "legitimate" to have a curriculum area focused on its use.

The superintendents saw each teacher's desk being equipped with a personal computer terminal capable of taking them into any information storage system, allowing them to

retrieve information from data bases around the globe. Teachers would also have video as a tool to use to evaluate themselves and their peers or to record student work.

They dream of a 21st century Iowa educational system that provides each student with a computer for their home. Each students' terminal will be hooked into a computerized encyclopedia. Their parents could conference with teachers using the computer.

These superintendents foresee students carrying disks instead of books. Using lap top computers, students do assignments, record homework, and take tests. Test results from each students' lap top terminal are conveyed quickly to the teachers' computer for scoring and storage.

There will be satellite dishes at every school that provide immediate transmission of world events. The Iowa Communications Network (ICN) and interactive video will be a part of classroom life. Simulation programs will be used routinely and kids can create or reenact any event on the computer screen.

One superintendent says "virtual reality" learning tools will be available too. By donning gloves and goggles, students will feel as if they have entered the computer screen. The simulation of reality is so complete that students will feel as if they are walking around in whatever environment is depicted on he screen. By donning the gloves

and goggles they can "become" any animal and experience reality as a frog or a lobster. They can be the "ball" in ball games, or watch the action from the right field bleachers, or from wherever they choose.

One superintendent says that his ideal 21st century Iowa school system will have "the best technology available, whatever the army has, schools will have." Another says that "technology will be as much a part of every classroom as the blackboard, no one will give it a second thought."

Flexibility

These superintendents describe multiple uses for technology in their future schools. One will use technology to "inject the closest thing to real life," virtual reality, into the classroom. Another wants to use technology to help teachers with grading, gathering information, and communicating with students in their homes. Another sees computers as a great tool to teach spelling. One superintendent will use technology "to make kids more self-reliant learners."

Limitations

A few superintendents wanted limited use of technology in their future schools. One thinks "kids working at home on computers" instead of coming to school is "nonsense" because "parents won't be home to supervise, they'll be away working

or playing golf." Another superintendent does not want his future students to become too dependent on technology. He worries how they would fare "if someone unplugged it." One superintendent says that computers in her ideal school would never replace "human interaction" as an instructional tool.

Summary and Discussion

The superintendents' dialogue provided five common themes which recurred throughout each of their visions, First, they characterized Iowa schools of the future as caring communities of learners in which relationships were valued and nurtured.

School Climate

People in these schools will form deep personal relationships with each other, rather than the business relationships typically formed among faculty. There will be "a district wide feeling of belonging." The atmosphere will "feel less formal and more human." People "will bond with each other." They will be responsible for each other and will care deeply about each other. Principals will care about the personal and professional well-being of teachers. Teachers will know and care about each of their students and students will care about each other.

These relationships will be supported by large and small changes in everyday school activities. Opportunities to talk with colleagues and to attend workshops and conferences will replace the isolated teacher existence experienced by most teachers. School councils, decision-making teams, and peer coaching and mentoring alliances will create "a spirit of collegiality and collaboration." New teachers will serve internships and be supported as they learn their teaching craft. They will feel surrounded by valued colleagues and friends.

Administrative Role

The autocratic principal of the 20th century is replaced with a facilitator whose primary function is to make sure that resources exist so that teachers can do their job well. These new administrators will meet with teachers not to criticize or to evaluate, but to understand and to assist them in becoming the best educator they can be.

Teacher evaluations will be transformed into a welcomed opportunity to sit down with a colleague and discuss professional issues. Teacher evaluation checklists will be replaced with teacher portfolios that give teachers an opportunity to display their best work.

Valuing Students

Children will feel close to their teachers and will experience teachers enjoying them and enjoying being with them. Teachers will be involved with kids both educationally and personally and will value their relationship with the kids.

Every student in 21st century Iowa schools will feel nurtured and listened to, nourished and cared for by everyone on the school faculty. Students will view school as a place to find help for themselves and their families.

Classroom Climate

The ideal Iowa teacher of the 21st century will be a person who is able to relate well to students. Teachers will be knowledgeable about people and not just subjects and must have counseling and social work skills. Humor, openness, and energy are the instructional tools these teachers will use to build relationships with everyone. Teachers will create a climate of caring and will have the children's' best interests at heart.

Cooperative learning strategies will forge the learning of cognitive and effective competencies as all members of this learning community struggle to do better. Students will come to school because they want to, not because they have to.

Trust

All members of this ideal Iowa school community will trust each other. Everyone will trust that the inevitable daily conflicts in school life will be routinely handled with fairness and good will. Everyone will seek understanding and not blame. There will be a sense of decency and fair play.

Next, the superintendents described an educational system that would model democratic principles in all aspects of school life.

According to the superintendents Iowans living in the 21st century will continue to believe that they have both moral and fiscal responsibilities to educate all citizens in the concepts and skills necessary to live in a democratic society. They believe that schooling should remain a public, collective responsibility. They seek a system of schooling that models and teaches both democratic conflict resolution principles that protect all citizens in a democratic society.

The superintendents would offer parents a choice within the public education system. They describe ideal schools that reject the privatization of education because it "supports quality education for the few rather than for all students."

Decision Making

Unlike present Iowa schools, the ideal Iowa school of the future would have a flattened decision-making structure. Gone would be the autocratic hierarchy of 20th century schools. Instead, a democratic process of decision making would appear. Teachers and administrators in this ideal Iowa school will form collective visions of the school they want and all members of the school community will be empowered to make their vision a reality.

Loosely networked schools with pared down bureaucracies will operate using a decentralized, school-based, decision-making model. Schools will form networks not hierarchies.

Autonomous Teachers

Teachers in ideal Iowa schools will be autonomous, well-prepared professionals, who will not be led by rules and regulations. Teaming and shared decision making will replace the more traditional hierarchy of teacher leaders in 21st century Iowa schools. Participatory democracy will prevail as the vehicle for solving school problems.

The role of the teacher will be filled by a variety of professionals, each possessing different skills and levels of expertise. Teachers in ideal Iowa schools will be able to choose any research-based instructional method they want, as long as all students are reaching their learning potential.

However, there will be a strict accountability system in place, defined by each school community. Teachers will remain accountable to their student customers and to their parents.

Parent Empowerment

Parents of children in this ideal 21st Iowa school system will feel empowered because they will be asked to make meaningful decision. They will have real and important roles to play in school life.

To encourage this democratic participation, schools will actively seek parental involvement. They will not be contacted only to involve a small slice of the school community, but will seek broad parental representation. They will visit homes of parents who do not usually come to school meetings.

Parents, business people, teachers, and students will come together and jointly decide the schools' mission and they will be heavily involved in deciding its curriculum. Democratic ideals will guide their curriculum decisions.

Student Empowerment

The ideal 21st century Iowa teacher will believe that the empowerment of students is the most important goal of education. Their classrooms will be living models of democracy and they will model democratic principles during

all student-teacher interactions. All classroom activities will be designed to teach and reinforce democratic life skills: cooperation and problem solving.

Students in these democratic classrooms will have more responsibility for their own learning and more choices. Students will feel like they have influence and control over their own destiny.

A third common theme the superintendents identified was that their ideal schools of the future would place supreme value on the conservation and development of all human resources. In the past, "Iowa has squandered its human resources" because they were plentiful.

In the 21st century, a reduced labor pool and an increased respect for the talents of all people will cause Iowans to rethink their approach to human resource development. The business community will tell schools in the 21st century that Iowa needs the strengths of all of its citizens. Everyone will begin to recognize that "each child has something terrific to offer."

Human Resource Development

According to the superintendents, perhaps for the first time, the state will believe that human resources are our most important resources and they will be willing to commit both time and money to the development of people resources.

Iowans will support spending for programs that address a broad spectrum of child needs and not just those directly related to instruction.

The public will see education as critical to the states' economic well-being, they will support the placement in schools of every technological learning tool available to business and to the military. Simulation devices, virtual reality, interactive video, and student lap top computers will become as common in classrooms as blackboards and chalk. Students will carry computer discs instead of textbooks. Teachers will use computer terminals at their desk to read student assignments, record student grades, develop tests, and gain instant access to world-wide data bases. Researching any topic will be an easy task for both teachers and students.

Developing All Children's Talents

The goal of all instruction in ideal Iowa schools will be to ensure that "all children are successful every day." Each teacher will demonstrate the belief that "given the right kind of learning experience, all children can be successful."

Teachers will also take the responsibility for eliminating boredom, and for making each student feel good about learning. They will know how to engage all students

and make them feel excited about learning. To meet the needs of all students, educators will value a variety of models of education and schools will not all look the same. Every child will receive an enriched, accelerated, challenging curriculum taught by appealing to the unique cognitive style of each student. No student will be assigned to a "slower track" of classes and "pull-out programs" will be used judiciously and only when research supports their use.

Developing Employee's Talents

This commitment to human resources development will extend to all members of the school community. In the 21st century, teachers will "have to be much more than they are now." Teacher training programs will be far more rigorous. Inadequate teacher training programs will disappear and only university training programs accredited by an independent, national body will exist.

Ideal 21st century Iowa school districts will commit to a strong program of staff development for all of their employees. Teachers will spend only a portion of their work week in direct contact with students; much of it will be spent in training and development activities. Faculties will be given ample time to learn, to practice, to reflect, to converse and study with peers, and to attend conferences. "One shot" workshops will disappear and training with

long-term follow-up components will be the norm. New teachers will learn their craft supported by mentors and coaches. Administrators will receive continual training and coaching. Everyone will be expected to continually grow and stretch.

Superintendents then described Iowa schools that were immensely flexible both in structure and daily functioning. New technology and scientific breakthroughs will cause a constant reshaping of the 21st century marketplace and the ideal 21st century Iowa school system will be capable of rapidly reinventing itself to accommodate this continuously changing 21st century world.

Rewarding Flexibility

Schools will reward and value change agents who can easily invent and apply new paradigms. Risk-taking will be supported and rewarded; mistakes will be expected as a natural by-product of experimentation.

Teachers and administrators will expect change. Rather than feeling threatened by new learning, school faculties will have developed processes for minimizing the stress that accompanies alterations in daily practices.

Flexible Curriculum

Design processes and documents will be structured in a way that allows easy incorporation of new knowledge. There

will be few state regulations pertaining to curriculum and instruction. Curriculum offerings will be developmentally appropriate and both the sequence and content will not be rigidly applied to all students. In quality 21st century Iowa schools it will be acceptable for both students and teachers to delete or add instructional objectives or to alter the order of their presentation in order to enhance mastery.

Instructional Variety

Teachers will know many different routes to each learning destination. Teachers will look to each student's unique needs to determine which route is best. They will consider different cognitive styles and modality preferences. They will design activities that appeal to both left and right brain learners.

Standing in front of the room and lecturing to a group of students who are sitting quietly in rows of desks will represent only one model of teaching, and this model will occur infrequently in quality 21st century Iowa schools. Instead, every day some students will receive instruction in small groups, others in one-to-one conversation with the teacher. Some students will learn alone, some will interact with a computer terminal and still others will learn at home.

Multiple Images of Schooling

Citizens of the 21st century will recognize the limited usefulness of the image of schooling that they remember from their childhood. They will let go of the notion that learning must be a somber, punitive process. Instead they will expect to see teachers and students laughing and talking as they learn.

Schools might refer to the traditional "little red schoolhouse," but it will also denote a store front, a shopping mall, an office building, or a building filled with lounge-like rooms and offices as alternative paradigms for "school" invented by the superintendents.

Parents and educators will easily accept the many new versions of 21st century Iowa schooling and will support innovative educational practices. Parents will feel comfortable when their children are schooled outside the classroom walls. They will feel comfortable with homework assignments that involve the students in thinking about problems rather than practicing rote skills.

Teachers will feel no need to adopt the teacher behaviors they have internalized from their own educational experiences. Instead, they will invent new teacher roles that support higher levels of learning for all students.

Finally, they described schools that required each student and faculty member to become high caliber problem

solvers. All members of the ideal 21st century Iowa school community will be expected to be reflective, expert problem solvers. Teachers and students will value inquiry and feel comfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty.

Creative Teacher Leaders

Rather then blindly following state and school district rules and regulations, faculties of the future will be responsible for shaping their practices to respond to the unique needs of their student body. They will be responsible for analyzing the needs and desires of their community and inventing a school vision and mission that responds to them. They then will be asked to design daily instructional practices that are uniquely suited to the needs of their particular students constituency.

Teachers will be expected to construct an effective learning process for each student they encounter. They will not be rewarded for memorizing and routinely applying a pat set of pedagogical rules. Instead, they will receive solid training in the best educational practices defined by educational research, and they will be trained to diagnose individual learner needs. Armed with that knowledge, they will be expected to act as "teacher researchers" who construct unique educational plans for each student, actively test and evaluate the results of their plan, and

modify its structure when student success is not forthcoming.

Learning Through Problem Solving

Lively, interactive encounters will characterize the learning process. Discrete subjects rarely will be taught; instead, instruction will be woven together thematically to encourage holistic understanding. Although a core of learning skills will be taught these skills will be applied continuously to understanding and solving problems that are real to the students and to their community.

Rote memorization will be deemphasized and instead students will be expected to synthesize information and then use it to solve problems and make decisions. Students will be taught to use the scientific method of investigation to study community problems. Students will learn processes rather than specifics and all learning activities will be designed to encourage intellectual exploration and creation. Students will be invited to explore existing knowledge so they can create new knowledge and new understanding.

Barriers

The superintendents were asked, "Given your knowledge of the current educational efforts in Iowa and your own district, what do you see are the barriers that will keep

your ideal vision from becoming a reality?" The following reflects their responses.

Historical Inertia

"The norm of the one room Iowa school house is so strong." "Parents are real eager for school to improve, they just don't want them to change." Most superintendents found the pleasant memory of individual's own childhood school experience as a serious barrier to school restructuring.

People want schools to be a little bit better, but they want them to look like they have always looked. "We all went to school and we know what its supposed to be like." Teachers have difficulty changing practice because of a strong attachment to childhood images of teachers, and the public has difficulty accepting any change that significantly alters the appearance of schools as they knew them.

"This is the kind of education I got, therefore, it will be fine for my kids." "There is this historical inertia, this is the way I did it." Superintendents think the power of the known, the tendency to habituate patterns of thinking and behaving, seriously obstructs school restructuring.

"We have created this Iowa educational system and its like concrete." "It is always hard to change the existing

way of doing business, particularly if you need to shift responsibilities." "Iowa tradition" impedes progress, according to these superintendents. One superintendent is convinced that "only when the dead weight of how we do it now is off our shoulders can we restructure the processes of what we now call school." "We must think about breaking molds," says one superintendent, "because we are completely constrained by the existing structures."

Local Schools Are Fine

"Most Iowans have not been convinced that there is a need to change schools." "The vast majority of Iowans don't get it. They are satisfied with schools as they are." "People think education is terrible, except in our schools." "Iowa schools have a strong tradition of success nationally, that is why parents and some educators feel that the system works, leave it alone," said one superintendent. Half of the superintendents said the reason school restructuring will not happen is because most Iowans are not convinced it is needed.

The public is not convinced that the reform of education is "a worthwhile investment," according to one superintendent. She thinks the public believes that educators will "waste" extra funding. Another superintendent says some Iowans are convinced there is a "national" problem

with education, but they do not relate that to their own neighborhood schools. She says this is a major barrier to achieving the educational reform agenda.

Because the public has not personalized educational problems, "we have waited too long" to make changes and the problems have become huge and complex. Therefore, this superintendent thinks the public's "complacency" continues to obstruct significant change. There is a "lack of commitment to change," so "people don't want to put money into schools." One superintendent says this lack of a stronger belief in the need to change schools stalls reform. "The moment you get a budget cut, they will go back to the same old thing." Another superintendent says because the public lacks a sense or urgency, they create "committees rather than commitment to change," and they "don't want to be bothered" with the hard work of reform.

Professional Educators

Most of the superintendents thought that educators themselves stood in the way of educational reform. "Educators are interested in preserving their jobs," says one superintendent. Another complains that there is "inertia" in education caused by a system that has made too many people too "comfortable" and secure in their jobs.

One superintendent sees educators who are "fearful of change" and "insecure about their ability to change." She thinks this fear prevents them from trying new practices in their classrooms. Another superintendent sees too many teachers "who are not learners by inclination."

The "training and capability of the staff" is deficient, according to one superintendent. University training programs that do not teach innovative educational practices produce teachers "that are not significantly different from the current batch of teachers," says another superintendent. "If the staff coming in is not different from the staff that is there, they become bright new versions of the old staff," she explains.

One superintendent sees "teachers who went into education not as facilitators of other peoples' growth but as a power base seeking a captive audience" as a serious barrier to implementing many of the reform recommendations. Two superintendents see educators "ego" as blocking educational reform, they blame educators who cannot say "I don't know."

Another superintendent thinks educators "doubt they'll be given the power to make changes, so they don't try." She thinks this can act as an excuse that makes educators comfortable with avoiding the stress of change.

Cost of Change

All of the superintendents mentioned a lack of funding as a serious barrier to Iowa school restructuring. One superintendent labeled it "the number one barrier." "Contrary to the desire of conservatives, reform cost money and we haven't been ready to pay the bill," comments another superintendent. "Nothing will happen if we don't have the money to reach our goals," said one superintendent. "Funding is involved with every aspect of school reform," said another, "Staffing, staff development, curriculum, and technology are all dependent on available funds." "Thanks to Washington, there are less funds to feed kids who are coming to school hungry," remarks another. "Tight finances," "inequitable funding formulas," and a "lack of funding for teacher education" squelch efforts to transform Iowa's schools.

Overwhelming Odds

A majority of superintendents describe the task of educational restructuring as "overwhelming," "messy," and "complicated." The "sheer magnitude of the problem" is seen as a barrier. Because restructuring schools is "perceived as an overwhelming task," educators do not believe that their visions of better schools are attainable, says one superintendent.

The enormity of the task causes a "grid lock" and "no one knows how to move or how to get started." Because the problems are so complex, "we lack a systemic view and we are only able to focus on one thing at a time."

One superintendent says, "Its hard to keep the energy flowing when you feel you can only make a small dent." Reforms "take so long" and require "so much energy" that important "political support doesn't last." Another superintendent says restructuring schools requires individuals who are comfortable with the ambiguity and messiness of trying new practices. She thinks that "most people don't like ambiguity."

Change Process

Over half of the superintendents think school restructuring is aborted because no one really understands the complicated process of change. One superintendent bluntly states: "We don't know how change happens." Another thinks even most educators "don't understand how the system works."

The public has an expectation that the problems of schools, like other aspects of modern life, can be quickly transformed. They do not understand that the "basic nature of schools is to resist change." People expect "rapid changes." They want "instant" changes and the changes they

want are in student achievement scores. Educators and taxpayers "lack the patience" necessary to see reforms institutionalized, says one superintendent. "We don't stick with things long enough to really understand the implications of what we are doing," says another.

Leadership Preparedness

Half of the superintendents think a lack of leadership preparedness has been a barrier to reform. They point to a "lack of visionary superintendents and principals," and instead see "superintendents and principals hired to do maintenance tasks and keep the lid on." "Administrators have not been prepared through course work and experience to understand the process of visioning and therefore do not have nor understand how to develop long-range visions with clear outcomes," says one superintendent, "and most of them are more comfortable talking about process rather than outcomes."

Another superintendent says that most leaders are working with an "unclear research base" and so "they don't really know what to do and what best practice is." "Leaders don't push hard enough to make schools more competitive," says one superintendent.

Public Relations

"Politics" and "politicizing the concept of restructuring" is what obstructs change, according to six superintendents. "School boards are highly politicized" and instead of commitment to real issues, many school board members are "committed to their own agenda." Politicians "posture rather than seriously work" at reform says another superintendent. One superintendent says the problem is that education has become a public relations business, "If it can't be presented to the public and accepted by them at 100%, then it is not an important thing to do."

Distrust

The public's distrust of educators and educators' distrust of each other act as barriers to school reform. This negative attitude does not build the commitment and positive energy necessary "to do the hard work of change," says one superintendent.

Inside the system, efforts to create a collegial atmosphere are thwarted because educators do not trust each other. Superintendents say that teachers "are fearful and tense" and don't trust school district administration. Teachers "fear reprisals from peers" if they work too hard or are too good, notes one superintendent.

Special Interest Groups

One of the reasons educators have failed to get support for reform efforts is that "they have failed to involve parents," thinks one superintendent. Another says educators think "its scary to involve parents, so they don't," because parents "lack ties to their schools" they do not come to their defense and they do not support educators in their efforts to reform.

One superintendent implicates teacher associations and unions and labels them barriers to school reform. According to him, they are more interested in "protecting their membership" than promoting quality education and she says unions create "pressure for the status quo" because the current system lacks an accountability component and is more comfortable for the membership. Another superintendent says that associations and unions "make it difficult to get rid of incompetent teachers."

Summary and Discussion

Four common themes: (a) insufficient funding, (b) powerful childhood memories including the public's lack of dissatisfaction with their own neighborhood schools, (c) educators themselves--their personal and professional short-comings, and (d) a lack of a sophisticated understanding of the change process emerged from the

superintendents' discussion of the barriers which will prevent their ideal Iowa school from becoming a reality.

According to the superintendents, insufficient funding is one reason many worthy reform efforts will fail. Many of the superintendents agreed that although increased educational funding was not sufficient to ensure the restructuring of Iowa schooling without it little or nothing would be accomplished.

Computers for every child and teacher, interactive video capabilities, simulation devices, and access to world-wide data bases all cost money. Therefore, funding is a critical component to the vision of a technologically rich educational environment.

Inadequate funding not only stifles educational technology it also becomes a key barrier to developing the vision that 21st century Iowa schools would place a supreme value on the development of all human resources. A lack of funding to develop the talents and interests of students and staff will inhibit the development of quality Iowa schooling. Staff development and training programs that impact what happens in school on a daily basis take enormous amounts of money to create an environment of mentors and coaches. To accomplish this vision, budgets for conferences and workshops will need to increase.

To become the caring, nurturing places that Iowa schools of the future need to be, the superintendents believe new sources of revenue must be found. An expanded array of social services will need to be available to students at the school site. More counselors are needed to work with families in which physical or substance abuse has become a problem. Administrators must be trained to seek fiscal support from the private sector. School business partners must be strengthened as taxpayers are convinced that schools do not waste money. Positive public relations must counter negative images of schooling if funding is to be available to support the vision of ideal 21st century Iowa schooling.

Next, many superintendents cited powerful childhood memories and the public's lack of dissatisfaction with their own neighborhood schools as an implicit barrier to accepting educational innovations that depart from the traditional form and function of Iowa schooling. People resist anything that takes them too far away from the picture of schooling they remember. Therefore, anything that departs from the childhood memory of schools is questionable. Often, Iowans want their schools to be a little bit better, but only if they can look pretty much like they have always looked. The visions expressed by the superintendents went beyond the one-room school house that many Iowans credit with having

done an effective job of educating them. Thus, significant school reform is in direct contradiction with the satisfaction that Iowans have with their current educational system.

Educators themselves, their personal and professional short-comings, were identified as obstacles to school reform by the superintendents. The superintendents envisioned a system of Iowa education which was immensely flexible both in structure and daily functioning and one that required each student and faculty member to become high caliber problem solvers. Unfortunately, according to the superintendents, some educators went into education not to become facilitators of other peoples' growth, but as a power base seeking a captive audience. Teachers find it difficult to let go of the autocratic teacher role and adopt a more facilitative stance with their students while some administrators are afraid of putting themselves in a vulnerable situation by empowering teachers. This constant lack of professional trust and respect among educators confuses the public, which in turn demonstrates a distrusts for teachers and administrators. This type of behavior does nothing to establish an air of risk taking which is necessary to create an environment that models democratic principles in all aspects of school life.

Finally, superintendents thought that a lack of a sophisticated understanding of the change process itself caused reform efforts to be prematurely aborted. Unfortunately, communities do not understand that three to five years must elapse before the effects of school reforms can be measured. They expect rapid change and are disappointed when it does not occur. Therefore, communities display a lack of patience with school reforms and question the rationale of changes that never seem to produce results. Unfortunately, these taxpayers and voters, as well as some educators, assume that enacting one particular reform item will result in immediate and thorough widespread improvements. This misconception complicates school reform and greatly diminishes the opportunity for a vision of ideal Iowa schooling from becoming a reality.

In summary, the 12 superintendents who were interviewed for this study described five common themes which they believed should be the vision of 21st century Iowa schools. These themes revolved around developing caring communities, democratic principles, human resources, a flexible structure, and students and educators as problem solvers. Despite the superintendents' optimistic visions, all readily identified certain barriers they thought likely would hinder achieving the image they envisioned. These factors included inadequate funding, an historical context of satisfaction

with past and current educational practice, an educational profession that lacks trust amongst its members, as well as a weak understanding or knowledge about how change occurs. Conclusions from the findings, discussions, and their implications are give in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of the Study

What the K-12 educational reform movement has done over the past decade is to create a great deal of dialogue around the beliefs, values, and purposes of schooling in this country. Conversations at the macro-level have been well documented; legislators, federal and state policy makers, the business community, and others have clearly articulated what they consider important (Nanus, 1992). What hasn't occurred as much is to listen to what those who are often held responsible for leading restructuring implementation--local school district superintendents--believe their schools should be, and to acknowledge the viewpoints of what these school leaders think will likely occur in their K-12 schools as a result of their reform efforts.

Leadership and a clear, guiding vision of the future are the key components of any significant change or reform effort (Schlecty, 1990). To date, the perspective of local public school superintendents has primarily been assumed, only partially described, or at times, simply absent from the discussions of educational reform (Sergiovanni, 1989).

Nevertheless, what school leaders envision is important because it "frames the future that one works to achieve" (Sheive & Schoenheit, 1987).

Iowa, like other states across the nation, has listened to federal rhetoric, debated school reform on the floor of the state legislature, yet frequently failed to consider what those at the local level thought important for educational reform. This study is an effort to ask superintendents what they think should be the future of K-12 education in the 21st century and thus attempt to better understand the direction of school reform in Iowa, and indirectly the nation.

The purpose of this study was to contribute to a better understanding of what Iowa school superintendents see as the future of K-12 Iowa education at the turn of the century; to inform state and local policy makers of insights and visions that Iowa school leaders have regarding what is important for the future of the children and youth in the state; and to contribute to the literature on visionary leadership of local district level leaders. More specifically, this study describes how 12 Iowa district level superintendents, who are considered leaders in the educational restructuring efforts, "frame the future" and thereby help guide the implementation of the current educational reform movement in the state.

Two research questions were addressed in this study:

1. If you could create a system of quality Iowa schooling for the 21st century what do you believe it should look like?
2. Given your knowledge of current educational reform efforts in Iowa and your own district, what do you see are barriers that keep your ideal vision from becoming a reality?

Qualitative methodology was used to review, analyze, and compare the gathered data to provide an in-depth description of the superintendents' vision and recognition of potential barriers to Iowa school reform in the 21st century. The analysis of the collected data was categorized into five common vision themes and four common barriers. The descriptions of the data based on these themes yielded the conclusions of this study.

In response to the first research question, the superintendents characterized their vision of Iowa schools as caring communities of learners in which relationships were valued and nurtured and where educational systems would model democratic principles in all aspects of school life. They placed a value on conservation and development of all human resources and hoped for a system that was considerably more flexible both in structure as well as daily functioning. Finally, they envisioned schools where each

student and faculty member was a high-caliber problem solver.

The superintendents' explanation of what likely would get in the way of achieving their vision of Iowa schools encompassed four primary areas. First, was insufficient funding; second, powerful childhood memories of their own schooling and their current satisfaction with their present neighborhood schools; a third barrier, according to the superintendents was educators themselves, their personal and professional short-comings; and finally, an insufficient understanding of the change process stood as a barrier to Iowa school reform.

Conclusions

The following two conclusions were drawn from this study:

1. Society is rapidly changing and schools must change as rapidly just to keep pace. Even more preferable, schools need to lead in the change. While the superintendents felt that their districts did provide students with a quality education, they anguished over their belief that their districts were falling further and further behind a rapidly changing world. Recognizing that schools are notoriously slow in making change, the superintendents were concerned if

schools merely stayed status quo, they quickly will fall behind where they need to be.

2. Superintendents can shape key factors to guide the future, others factors they feel are deeply embedded in the broader society and therefore require broad community effort to help reshape. The superintendents who took part in this study recognize and accept that they can positively affect educators' personal and professional short-comings and assist in helping themselves and others gain a more sophisticated understanding of the change process. However, they are skeptical that they alone can affect school funding and the powerful childhood memories and lack of dissatisfaction with their own neighborhood schools that contribute to stifling school reform. To be successful in these arenas the superintendents recognize the need of broad-based community assistance.

Implications

The superintendents interviewed for this study paint the future of Iowa schooling with a broad brush. Their views of what should happen in Iowa's schools of the 21st century dealt with not only the broad purposes of education, but also focused on a variety of means they saw as necessary to bring about those purposes. In that same vein, the barriers they offered were similarly broad, dealing from the implicit

and almost invisible barrier of deeply held values, to the explicit and immediate practical concern of a lack of funds to get the job done.

Four implications were drawn from this study:

1. It seems ironic that the deeply held beliefs that Iowans have about education provide both the reasoning as to why schools should exist, as well as being a major barrier to the realization of the dreams that Iowans have for their 21st century schools. Clearly, the superintendents expressed a moral and ethical commitment to provide for the success of every child with a noticeable emphasis on economic opportunity and preparation for a lifetime of learning. According to the superintendents the purpose of Iowa schools is firmly rooted in the same traditions in which schools were started. At the same time, however, it is this deeply rooted tradition which is seen as a barrier to what the superintendents envision Iowa schools of the future becoming. This constant, dynamic tension between the security and success of what is and the compelling desire to embrace what might be prevents Iowa schools from accomplishing significant educational reform.

2. It is ironic also that the superintendents recognize that significant and successful reform must begin in the classrooms across the state and that the professional classroom teachers are a crucial bridge to the future.

However, superintendents also view teachers as a potential major obstacle to any successful reform. Teachers often speak to the need of more autonomy, flexibility, and decision-making authority, yet appear to balk at the responsibility and accountability that accompanies each. The superintendents' surmise that educators have become too comfortable and secure in their positions, too fearful of change and too insecure about their ability to change. Thus, for a number of reasons they lack the commitment to champion necessary change.

3. A third irony is that a broadly misunderstood reality of our times is change and yet change is the key to understanding how to realize the dreams of Iowa students in a rapidly changing social and economic world. A tremendous amount of tension and anxiety exists for superintendents who clearly see that their own colleagues do not understand change or the change process. Yet, because their position and responsibility are accountable for welcoming, understanding, and guiding the change process for their districts, it is of central importance that superintendents thoroughly understand change in theory and practice.

4. Finally, the superintendents see themselves trapped between the jaws of unfunded and unworkable state and federal mandates and the general politicization of schools on one side, and on the other, citizens who are satisfied

with things as they were a generation ago. Thus, superintendents are charged with providing leadership and vision while attempting to provide stability and a reasonable direction for Iowa schools. They are caught in a multidimensional squeeze from federal and state legislators who lack a clear understanding of education, nervous and unpredictable school boards, teachers who lack trust and support, and local citizenry who find it palatable to remain uncommitted and uninvolved.

Recommendations

Childhood images of Iowa schooling were mentioned by the superintendents as significant barriers to school reform. Further investigation of these images of the "the way Iowa schooling is supposed to be" held by the general public and educators themselves is needed so that the content of these images can be better understood.

Continuation of this research in the following manner will allow further study of the importance of visioning in education. New studies should include:

1. Investigating the visions of ideal Iowa schools created by various groups of stakeholders (e.g., teachers, building administrators, members of the business community, parents)
2. Identifying how visions actually get implemented.

As the process of visioning becomes more integral to school district planning across Iowa, answers to questions such as these will hold a great deal of importance to the future of Iowa K-12 public education in the 21st century.

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